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ABSTRACT

Maryland's Perryville High School Positive Disciplinary Project involves both actively disruptive students referred by the administration and students who have demonstrated the potential to be disruptive who are referred by teachers, guidance counselors, or parents. In either instance, the student becomes a part of the program for the entire school year. The inschool "suspension" portion of the program, whereby students are sent to the Alternative Education Center (a modified classroom located in the school building), is its most obvious aspect. The second phase of the program, counseling students, is done both formally and informally in the center or in other areas of the school. The program, initiated in response to a 1977 self-study of discipline problems, achieved the following goals for 1982-83: (1) reducing the number of out-of-school suspensions by 40 percent; (2) reducing socially unacceptable behavior during the school year, measured by a 20 percent reduction in the number of referrals to the assistant principal; (3) decreasing the number of students who withdraw from school because of the results of disciplinary actions; and (4) reducing the number of referrals of students adjudicated delinquent. (MLF)

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POSITIVE DISCIPLINARY PROJECT

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Paper presented on February 5, 1984 at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals in Las Vegas, Nevada (February 3-7, 1984).

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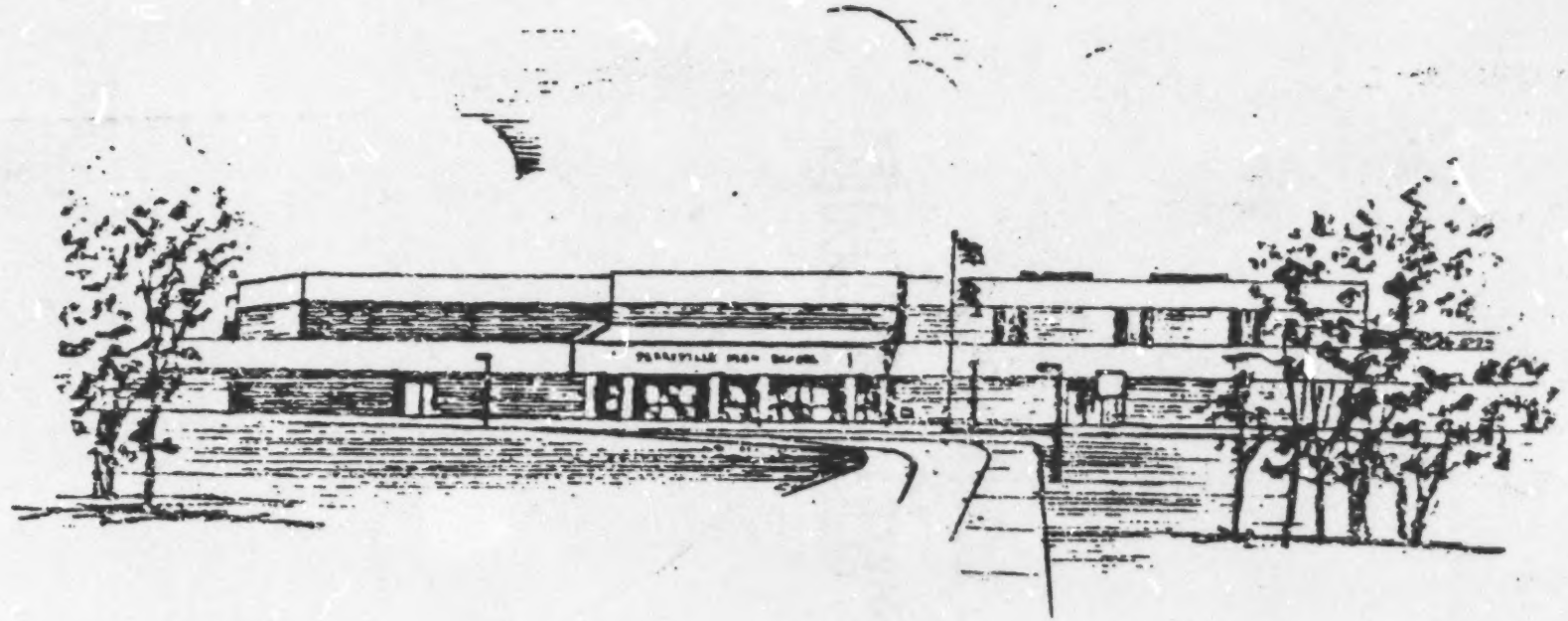


POSITIVE DISCIPLINARY PROJECT

Where have all the "good old days" gone? In years past when students misbehaved in school, they were given a "vacation," a period of time to reflect on their wrongs and to repent, or so said the school administrator, but as all of the kids knew, it was really a time to sleep late, watch television, go shopping, hunting, fishing or just plain relax. Fortunately, those days are almost gone - at least at one high school in Cecil County, Maryland, where the educational climate has improved significantly without providing time out of school for the disruptive student.

The 1980's will be remembered as the decade that America studied, criticized and maybe even improved their public schools. Numerous studies attacked the status quo of the present educational system and from the president on down, education has become " the issue." Although many areas have been examined by each study, the major underlining concern that has been prevelent in almost every issue is student behavior. That underlining concern and the viable discipline alternative that is offered through a positive disciplinary project is the purpose of this article. It is the belief of this author that the public schools can be improved and those administrators who are willing to be innovative and willing to establish selective organizational change within their schools will be successful in combating the problems facing our schools.

Student behavior or misbehavior is considered by many as the all encompassing threat to our present public schools. All the curriculum revisions, quality teachers and innovative ideas won't make a difference if the school setting is shrouded by fear, violence or negative attitudes. Although school violence is a major concern facing many of our schools, there is a difference between the violence facing our schools and the day to day discipline problems that our teachers have to experience. While schools may have to deal with violent acts such as assaults, weapons and drugs, those problems are usually combated with

expulsions and police referrals. The discipline problems that will not go away are the "little" issues that teachers must face... a student will not be expelled for talking, tardiness or truancy. It is the minor disruptive behavior which must be attacked. While many believe suspending the disruptive students from school is the answer, many disagree.

Suspending a student from school does have an effect on the building's total academic program; teachers are able to teach, and students are able to learn since the disruptive student is out of the class. Such removal does tend to have a positive effect on school morale and the general educational climate of the school. It also makes the teaching process more enjoyable since fear or concern over class disruptions or violence is minimized. Although the classroom climate is improved, the improvement is usually short lived, since the disruptive student eventually comes back to school. Only through an expulsion or withdrawal will the classroom be voided of individuals who are disruptive or failed to follow school procedures. Therefore, the traditional punishment serves only as a band-aid to a major sore. In addition, as most national studies have stressed the school can no longer look to the family to rectify unacceptable behavior - a new approach has to be considered. Without a new approach to the disruptive student, the public schools will only continue to decline in the eyes of society.

Accepting that a suspension from school is not the answer, many alternatives began to be considered in the mid 1970's. One ingredient of many of the ideas was a positive approach as compared to the negative aspects of out of school suspension. At Perryville High School, Cecil County, Maryland that positive approach to discipline became a reality seven years ago when the school administration began to evaluate the existing discipline policies. In an attempt to effectively discipline students, keep them in school and improve student attitudes the Positive Disciplinary Project was implemented and has proven to be a tremendous success as evidenced by its record of accomplishments.

Departure from Tradition

Joining the list of edcuational jargon is the term "alternative education." What that term or concept means varies from state to state and school district to school district, but the overall intent is to provide for the continuation of the educational programs of those students unable to perform within the regular school setting or within established school policies. Alternative educational programs have varied from the permanent removal of students from their regular educational programs to the temporary removal of students to other programs. The permanent removal of an individual, for disciplinary reasons, requires that in many states an alternative program be established. In some school districts this may be a night school program, a special

center for disruptive students or a General Education Diploma (GED) program. For those students who are not elligible nor disruptive enough to deserve expulsion, these programs offer little assistance. An additional measure is needed to assist in the handling of the disruptive or truant student. That additional measure is in-school suspension, the disciplinary "alternative". As the description of the Perryville High School project will show, in-school suspension is an excellent step, but the additional measure of counseling and non-school governmental support broadens the scope and effectiveness.

Cooperative Effort

The alternative educational program at Perryville High School has brought together the various resources, financial and supportive, offered through the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Juvenile Service Administration, the Cecil County Board of Education, the community and the school.

Prior to the opening of school in 1977, an administrative review of the existing Perryville High School disciplinary policy was conducted. In an attempt to reduce student disruptions, violations of school policies and negative disciplinary actions, a limited positive disciplinary project was established. The program was limited to in-school "suspension" since the guidance aspects of the present positive disciplinary project was not a part of the original program. The planning and organization of the project

was completed by the adiminstration and implemented through the cooperation of the school staff.

During the 1979-80 school year, the established positive disciplinary project was expanded to include smoking violations, an expansion that was approved by the Cecil County Board of Education as an alternative to suspending students from school for smoking. The policy for smoking violations is mandated in Cecil County by School Board Policy. That policy states that students will be suspended for three days for the first smoking infraction. In contrast, Perryville High School students serve 3 days in-school suspension and are required to complete an educational packet on smoking.

Because the statistical evaluation of the 1979-80 project supported the Positive Disciplinary Project, a request for a grant to institute an Alternative Education Program was made to the Maryland State Department of Education prior to the opening of school in 1980. The expansion was developed to include an additional facet - counseling. Having an individual discuss with the students the effect of their misbehavior, encourage positive behavior, and lend an ear to those students facing problems would benefit the entire educational program as well as the student.

The counseling provided by the program coordinator was not meant to eliminate the efforts of the guidance counselor. The efforts of the coordinator were only to supplement the regular

activities of the school counselor. The availability of the coordinator and the rapport established over a year were beneficial to the student as he attempted to change or come to a better understanding of external problems. The grant, developed by the administration of Perryville High School with the cooperation of Mr. H. Orville Berwick, County Superintendent of Schools, was approved and funded by the Maryland State Board of Education.

Regretfully, as with many pilot programs, success and financial support do not always go hand in hand. The funds provided by the Maryland State Department of Education were terminated after the pilot year; therefore, the positive disciplinary project for the 1981-82 school year operated essentially as the program did during the 1979-80 school year.

Although the full program operated for only one year, the statistical and educational effectiveness indicated the success of the alternative program. Reductions of out-of-school suspensions, office referrals, classroom disruptions, and student drop-outs were immediately realized at the completion of the initial year of operation. In addition, the long-range effects of the alternative education program are still being felt today because of the intrinsic changes that have occurred in the student body and staff.

During the spring of 1982, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services indicated their interest in the alternative

education project as a delinquency prevention program and recommended that a grant application be processed to reinstitute the program for the 1982-83 school year. The Juvenile Services Administration felt that the Positive Disciplinary Project would be an effective example of delinquency prevention because of the selective organizational change in the school. The school received grants from the Juvenile Services Administration and the Maryland State Department of Education. The balance of the budget was then funded by the Cecil County Board of Education.

The program initiated during the 1982-83 school year was very successful in meeting the goals established for the project. Each of the program goals, which are listed below, was achieved.

1. Reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions during the 1982-83 school year by 40%.

2. Reduce socially unacceptable behavior during the 1982-83 school year, measured by a 20% reduction in the number of referrals to the assistant principal.

3. Decrease the number of students who withdraw from school because of the results of disciplinary actions.

4.

Reduce the number of referrals of students adjudicated delinquent by the local Juvenile Services Administration. Eliminate any additional student referrals to the Juvenile Services Administration for the duration of the project.

Project Description

According to the Maryland Juvenile Services Administration, the Positive Disciplinary Pilot Project at Perryville High School is an example of delinquency prevention through a selective organizational change in the school. The "organizational change" in the school which has occurred is reflected in the establishment of an additional disciplinary measure and program. The Perryville High School Positive Disciplinary Project is divided into two phases: actively disruptive students who are referred to the program by the administration and students who have demonstrated the potential to be disruptive who are referred by individual teachers, guidance counselors or parents. In either instance, the student becomes a part of this program for the entire school year. Included in

the description of disruptive students are those who fail to follow school rules (truancy, leaving school grounds, smoking, etc.) and therefore have disrupted the educational process and those who have actually been involved in disruptive behavior (talking, fighting, etc.).

The in-school "suspension" portion of this program is the most obvious aspect when viewed by others outside the program. It is vital, as it is necessary, to administer punishment quickly and effectively and to offer support to an actively disruptive student at the time of the disruption. For this reason, the basic standard operating procedure for in-school "suspension" has been developed to meet the immediate needs of everyone involved - student, administration, faculty, and parents.

The second phase of the program, counseling students, is of equal importance. Working with students who have been on in-school suspension has had a beneficial effect on maintaining an extremely low recidivism rate. Counseling is done both formally and informally in the center or in other areas of the school. In fact, students and parents

have sought out the program to help with school, community and family problems.

The following operational procedures demonstrates that the total staff and family support is imperative for the Positive Disciplinary Center.

A.

1. Student is referred to the office for disciplinary infraction. Action is taken by assistant principal or principal.

2. Coordinator and assistant principal meet daily at conclusion of day to discuss students placed on in-school suspension by the principal or assistant principal.

3. Parents are notified by phone and mail by the program coordinator of child being placed on in-school supension. A parent conference is required prior to a student returning to regular classes.

4. Student's assignments are obtained from teachers before first period of school day by program coordinator or student aides. This is the most important aspect of the project. Total

staff cooperation is imperative if the project is to be successful.

B.

1.

Student and project coordinator meet - student completes school and community questionnaire.

2.

Program coordinator establishes folder on student with:

a. Student questionnaire

b. Class schedule of student

c. Correspondence pertaining to student's in-school suspension.

3.

Program coordinator conferences with student at the end of the suspension period to discuss disciplinary infraction and attempts to alleviate further disciplinary problems.

C.

1.

Program coordinator discusses student referrals with appropriate personnel (administration, faculty, guidance counselor, and/or parents).

D.

1.

Monthly student conferences are scheduled to monitor progress of student.

Staff

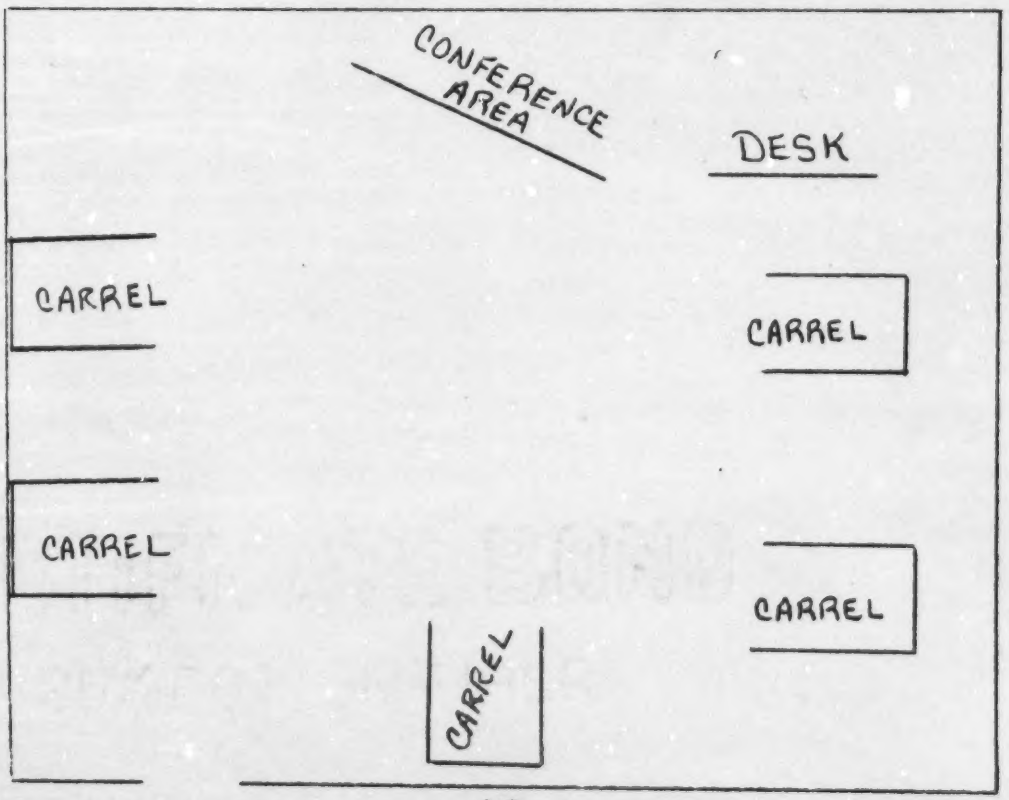
The Alternative Education Center is staffed by a coordinator who is provided secretarial assistance through the administrative office. The coordinator's position is the backbone of the project. Just like the "principal makes the school," the coordinator makes the Alternative Education Center. Therefore, in choosing a coordinator for Perryville High School, every effort was made to choose an individual who would not only be an effective extension of the administration, but who would be committed to helping students succeed in school. Qualifications for the coordinator position were establishd after a careful examination was made of the program goals. It was decided that the most

qualified person for this position did not necessarily need to be a certified teacher. Although certification may appear to be a beneficial qualification, it was determined that lack of certification should not exclude an individual.

Setting

The Alternative Education Center is located adjacent to the media center complex. The center is a classroom that has been modified to house several study carrels for independent work, a coordinator's desk and a conference area.

Positive Disciplinary Center



Effectiveness by Duplication

Although at times, even the best programs fail to receive funding, the Alternative Education Program at Perryville High School has begun to have an effect on the educational program offered by the Cecil County Board of Education. After struggling through years of no funding, limited funding, full funding and multiple funding from various state agencies, the program has established the foundation to demonstrate the success and monetary value of positive disciplinary projects. In addition to the expansion of the program by the local Board of Education, several other school systems have indicated an interest in the program.

As the 1983-84 school year begins, the effectiveness and acceptance of the alternative educational program becomes apparent with the Juvenile Services Administration increasing the financial funding of the project by 10%. With the total support of the Superintendant of Schools, the County Board of Education and the Maryland State Department of Education - the Positive Disciplinary Project concept has been expanded throughout Cecil County. Within the county, four additional programs have been instituted. All of the programs, with

individual school variations, are based on the Perryville High School success.

In Conclusion

There is not a public school in the country that has not experienced disruptive student behavior. Ranging from major to minor incidents, each disruption has an effect on the school, staff and student body. The Positive Disciplinary Project at Perryville High School has proven that, in many instances, removing students from school need not occur. While expulsion and suspension remain the final solution to continued disruptive or overt behavior, the Perryville High School Alternative Education Program may be the answer administrators have been looking for to reduce the routine disruptive behavior.